



# Urban Design and Enhancement

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## *A Resource Guide of the 2000-2020 Bryan Comprehensive Plan, City of Bryan, Texas*

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### **Introduction**

The City of Bryan's roots are in the agricultural and banking activities of the early Texas economy. What began as a townsite of 640 acres is now the historic downtown of the modern day city. The original streets were laid out in a grid system typical of towns in the late nineteenth century. Centered on Main Street and north south parallel streets that are now named Bryan and Tabor, the City grew and prospered. When the railroad came through town, the extensions to the east west numerical streets took a decided jog to the southeast due to the location of the railroad tracks. Not far from the centrally located commercial buildings, the prosperous bankers and merchants built large homes on 27<sup>th</sup> through 32<sup>nd</sup> Streets in what is now the Eastside Historical District.

Over the years the city expanded first to the north and later east to the State Highway 6 Bypass and west to Highway 2818. The downtown was the center of activities until the 1960's when retail activities began to move out to Texas Avenue and then to the State Highway 6 Bypass and to the newer centers near and in College Station. Now the main business areas of the city are along Briarcrest Drive, Villa Maria and Texas Avenue, but the downtown is beginning to experience a renewal of activities of both businesses and residences.

In the City of Bryan, there is a renewed desire to improve the public image. Improvements to the entrances to the City are being enhanced so that there is more visual appeal that say "Welcome to Bryan". Overhead utility lines are being placed underground where feasible. Streets and sidewalks improvements are examples of improvements that demonstrate what a pleasant place Bryan is—to convey what a nice place the city is to live, work, shop and visit.

Citizens have expressed a great interest in improvements to the appearance of many areas of the City. They recognize the potential for redevelopment of the downtown area and along major corridors. They visualize attractively landscaped roadways and pleasant places to walk. Successful retail and office areas that appeal to shoppers are high on their lists of desires. They see the opportunities in the downtown to create a destination that combines a lively entertainment district in an historically significant area with unique retail stores interspersed with restaurants, professional offices and even residential units on the upper floors.

Previous improvement and development plans include *Bryan Forward*, *Brazos 2020 Vision*, *1992 Downtown Improvement Plan*, *1993 Bryan Comprehensive Plan*, and *Downtown Bryan Redevelopment Proposal by the Eisenhower Leadership Development Group at Texas A&M (1994)*. These plans made many observations and recommendations, which have either been implemented, are still viable, or are now inapplicable due to changes that have occurred since the plans were developed. This resource guide uses the recommendations in these plans while adding realistic implementation actions to enhance the city's appearance and vitality. All of these plans emphasized the necessity for public/private partnerships, citizen participation and the use of local resources. The involvement of the citizens of Bryan and their support is vital to the success of any civic improvement effort.

## The New “CBC”

Traditionally CBD is the acronym for the Central Business District, the core and location of business activity. Over the years these areas, which were often downtown, have diminished in importance as commercial establishments moved out to newer, more accessible locations or went out of business. In Bryan, what used to be the CBD is now called Historic Downtown Bryan. The term CBD has been redefined to be the Central Business Corridor (CBC), the active commercial area from east to west along Briarcrest Drive and Villa Maria.

## Purpose

The purpose of this resource guide is twofold. The first part is to establish general Urban Design guidelines with implementation actions to improve the overall appearance and function of the City as a whole. The second part will identify goals, objectives, and implementation actions to revitalize and enhance the downtown Historic Downtown Bryan, the Central Business Corridor and thoroughfares. The identification of many of these items comes directly from the citizens and the 1998-99 Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) who want the City of Bryan to be recognized as the fine place it is.

Through combination of the review of previous plans and major input from the citizens at the Community Forum and the Comprehensive Plan Update Citizens Advisory Committee (CPAC) the following issues related to the appearance were identified:

- ◆ **Identity of the City** - Bryan truly has a long history and visual appeal. The assets of the City need to be promoted in a unified manner. The use of the heart as a symbol of Bryan is very positive for it symbolizes more than a central location—it is also the city and its people.
- ◆ **Entrances to the City** - Welcoming signs and landscaping should denote the entrances into the City. “Gateways” (entrances) promote the attractiveness of the City. Other appearance enhancements include roadways of adequate width, sidewalks and curbs in good condition, street trees and seasonal plantings. Continuation of the improvements in signage for public facilities should be encouraged. Directional signage and street improvements should assist in providing recognizable access to Historic Downtown Bryan.
- ◆ **City beautification** - The overall aesthetic potential of the City, the CBC and Historic Downtown Bryan is ready for development. Additional landscaping in medians and rights-of way greatly increases the visual appeal. Cooperative efforts of neighborhoods and civic groups can provide the additional maintenance requirements to maintain the improvements. Screening of outdoor manufacturing facilities and storage should be encouraged.
- ◆ **Improvements to the appearance, infrastructure and structures in the older neighborhoods** - A continuing program to improve the overall safety, appearance and function of the older residential areas should be implemented. Great progress has been made through the Community Development Block Grant program and private individuals, but there are opportunities for even more improvements through a combination of public and private efforts.
- ◆ **Improvements to commercial corridors and areas** - Major corridors such as SH 21, Texas Avenue, South College, Villa Maria/Briarcrest, and MLK will benefit from increased attention to landscaping and street trees, reduction of signage, elimination of clutter, and improvements to the building facades.
- ◆ **Support and expansion of the historical districts** - The Downtown and Eastside Historical districts should continue to be recognized and protected as valuable assets. They demonstrate the ability and success of public/private cooperation.

- ◆ **Historic Downtown Bryan revitalization and utilization** - There is great interest in making the downtown a viable commercial area that would attract not only visitors, but residents as well. Opportunities are present to develop new and expand existing facilities in this older part of the city. Over the years a number of plans have been prepared these should be combined into one consensus-driven plan that has specific tasks for implementation. A number of buildings would benefit from restoration and increased maintenance. Directional signage and street improvements are greatly needed to provide recognizable access to Historic Downtown Bryan.
- ◆ **Encourage retail shopping, restaurant, entertainment and residential establishments or units in Historic Downtown Bryan** - Development of tax incentives and a unified economic development campaign will support the existing businesses and attract new ones.
- ◆ **Revitalization Concerns** —There are a limited number of buildings currently available for restoration. The costs associated with building renovations and requirements are obstacles to someone wanting to locate a business and/or residence. Asbestos abatement and other remediations are costly, but often necessary, procedures.
- ◆ **Underutilization of properties and buildings in commercial areas** -- Along the CBC, new buildings are replacing ones that are really not obsolete, just older. A program with tax incentives, public/private partnership should be developed to enable businesses to remodel and locate in existing structures rather than to have them stand empty. Various means of adaptive reuse need to be explored to encourage redevelopment in older existing structures.

## URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

Urban design is the combination of appearance and function—how the city looks to both residents and visitors and how the important areas work together. Within these contexts urban design works to form the sense of community. In Bryan, the community is a diverse composition of commercial, recreational, historical, and residential elements, which are independent and yet intermingled. Together these elements form the overall visual appearance of the community.

### General Guidelines for Improvement

Various components of urban design can be used to improve the appearance of the community:

**Overall visual appearance**—The overall visual appearance includes the building facades, streets, utilities, trees, plants, and signs—what meets the eye—what forms the overall impression of the city. Improvements to the appearance may include the removal of “slipcover” facades to reveal the original structure, relocation of overhead utility lines and reduction of signs.

**Area identification**—Area identification includes distinctive signage, lighting, landscaping, sidewalk design, and items that distinguish the area from the surrounding city. Several areas have distinctive logos on the street signs that denote a special area such as the Downtown and Eastside Historical Districts. Other areas of the city such as the CBC, could be likewise identified.

**Infrastructure**—Streets, water and sewer lines, overhead utilities, sidewalks and even parks are part of the infrastructure aspect of urban design. Sidewalks can be much more than concrete strips. More than just necessities for pedestrians, they should provide pleasant places to walk and linger to observe adjacent features. They can include brick or stone pavers to improve the appearance. When increased in width and landscaped they become amenities for use by residents and visitors alike. Sidewalks also link one activity center to another and

relieve traffic congestion by encouraging people to walk rather than drive. Maintenance is required and must be at as high a standard as can be agreed upon by the citizens and sustained by the City's budget.

**Parking**—As in any city, parking is a necessity. On-street parking is convenient for shoppers and merchants, but often unattractive and a problem when cars are required to back into the flow of traffic. Angle and parallel street parking with parking islands, landscaping and trees, and decorative paving can be utilized if appropriately designed for safety and mobility.

Off-street parking lots provide a better place to park, but are not perceived as convenient. Parking lots should include trees and landscaping and should be encouraged to become “car parks”, places not only to leave the car, but also to rest and enjoy the outdoors in an attractive setting.

**Corridors**—Streets, pedestrian and greenbelt linkages are opportunities for corridors. They are included as an urban design element so that their appearance and function can be addressed for improvements. Major corridors, such as the CBC, can benefit from improved sidewalks, landscaping and signage as well as traffic flow. Streets and rights-of-way can be designated as corridors and specific requirements for landscaping, signage, building setbacks and parking can be imposed.

**Advertising signage**—Businesses require identification and directional signs; however, these signs can be designed and located to form a better visual impression without detracting from their purpose. The City's sign ordinance includes provisions to regulate the maximum amount of signage allowed for wall, ground, window signs, spacing and even recommend styles in keeping with the desired overall visual appearance formulated by a consensus of the citizens and the elected officials. The Historic Downtown Bryan and the Villa Maria Overlay District already have such sign requirements in place. Similar requirements should be encouraged in other areas of the City including the CBC along Briarcrest Drive.

**Directional and identity signage**—Direction, location and identity signage, which inform and establish a sense of place, need to be appropriately designed and located to direct and inform without becoming cluttered. The use of street signs with area logos helps identify areas. Colored banners are used on light standards or buildings. Signs need to be coordinated and placed in locations where they are easy to read from the street. In areas of the city that are distinctive in appearance or use, entrance and internal signage should be used for identification.

**Landscaping** enhances the overall visual appearance as well as contributes to a healthier, cooler and cleaner environment. Trees and plantings along streets make living and visiting the city a more pleasant experience. The City should adopt a landscaping and tree protection ordinance that establishes the overall requirements and the types and locations where trees and plants are needed and appropriate. For example, trees placed in and around parking lots improve the appearance while providing shade. Requiring the replacement of trees removed for new construction and planting of street trees in old and new commercial and residential development will further enhance the community's appearance. However, it is important to note that all plantings require maintenance either by the City or by property owners, community organizations, and neighborhood groups.

Perimeter screening of parking facilities will reduce the negative appearance of such areas. Low shrubbery that shields the vehicle lights and bumpers will add to the visual appearance while reducing the impact of the lights on the surrounding areas. Consideration should be given to both the design and maintenance so that there is adequate visibility from the street.

**Traffic calming devices** can be utilized to reduce traffic speed and safety problems on local streets. Potential techniques include speed humps, street closures, bulb-outs and traffic circles, high visibility crosswalks, narrower lanes, and landscaped medians

"Streetscape" is a term that is often used to draw all the preceding elements together. Both visitors and residents react positively to an attractive appearance of the streetscape.

## Goal, Objectives and Implementation Actions

The following goal, objectives and actions on how to address the overall appearance and function of the City of Bryan have been developed to effectively guide the improvement for the next 20 years. It is essential for the City to periodically review and update the proposed objectives and actions in order to seize opportunities as they present themselves.

**Goal** *The City of Bryan is an attractive and viable place to live, work and visit. Not only is it located in the heart of Texas, it is a community with a heart.*

**Objective A:** Entrances to the City shall be attractive with identification signage and landscaping to welcome residents and visitors. Areas along thoroughfares shall be identified as the gateways and scenic corridors.

- Action 1 Identify and develop specific locations for the gateways and corridors on the following roadways that lead into the City. **See Figure 1, Gateways and Corridors Map.**
- Texas Avenue at Hensel
  - 29<sup>th</sup> Street south of Rosemary
  - Highway 6 Bypass north of city limits at University Drive (gateway corridor)
  - Briarcrest Drive at Highway 6 Bypass in all directions
  - University Drive at Highway 158
  - Briarcrest Drive at Highway 158
  - Booneville Road and William Joel Bryan Drive
  - Old Reliance Road at Highway 6 Bypass
  - Highway 21 at the city limits
  - Tabor Road at the Highway 6 Bypass
  - Highway 2818 at Highway 6 Bypass and South of the Bypass (gateway corridor)
  - Highway 21 at Highway 2818
  - Finfeather to Highway 47
  - Highway 2818 north of Turkey Creek (gateway corridor)
  - Finfeather Drive and Wellborn Road around F&B
  - South College between Villa Maria and downtown
  - SH 47 Scenic Corridor
  - University Drive at Highway 158
- Action 2 Prepare specific gateway and corridor plans for the gateways and corridors for landscaping and entrance signage.
- Action 3 Design appropriate monument signs that are visually appealing and install at the identified gateways.
- Action 4 Landscape with appropriate plants, particularly crepe myrtle.
- Action 5 Incorporate the acquisition and installation costs into the Capital Improvement Program and Annual Budget.

**Objective 2** The City will showcase the recognizable and unique identities of different areas of the community. These areas include the Historic Downtown Bryan, the original townsite, the Downtown Historical District, the Eastside Historical District, the Central Business Corridor (CBC) along Briarcrest and Villa Maria, South College Drive, the Medical Center, Blinn College and residential areas.

- Action 1 Design and install distinctive street signs, signals, and directional signage identifying areas of the city as unique areas and focal points of community activity. Select or design street signs, street signals, and directional signage that are unique and consistent with the historic or special character of the area. Request input from the Historic Preservation Commission and other interested and appropriate organizations.
  - Action 2 Actively enforce the sign ordinance to ensure compliance.
  - Action 3 Incorporate acquisition and installation costs into the Capital Improvement Program and Annual Budget. Also consider state and federal grant funds that may be available.
  - Action 4 Partner with the Chamber of Commerce, business groups, businesses schools and local organizations to develop an on-going banner program that promotes local businesses, festivals and community activities.
- Objective 3** Vacant and undeveloped properties present opportunities for renovation and in-fill development. Consideration should be given to a property maintenance code and enforcement program for such properties. Encourage and support private initiatives to landscape and beautify vacant lots. Potential economic incentives for development and redevelopment should be considered. Zoning variances or rezoning could also be considered for in-fill properties that are constrained under existing zoning requirements and standards.
- Action 1 The City should promptly enforce ordinances regarding property maintenance.
  - Action 2 Consider zoning and other code changes to facilitate redevelopment.
  - Action 3 Conduct a visual property and building maintenance survey and identify improvement priorities.
  - Action 4 Consider the implementation of maintenance requirements ordinance to provide standards for upkeep and improvements.
  - Action 5 Develop a program to encourage property owners to maintain and enhance their property so as to be an asset to the City.
- Objective 4** Improve the visual environment of the City, the CBC and Historic Downtown Bryan by relocating or burying overhead utility lines where practical and feasible.
- Action 1 Establish a partnership with Bryan Texas Utilities (BTU) and other local utility providers to determine the cost, timing and feasibility of relocating overhead lines underground within the City, the CBC and Historic Downtown Bryan to support the enhancement of the visual environment.
  - Action 2 Wherever possible utility lines shall be buried, located at the rear of lots or on the perimeter of subdivisions. Revisions to the Subdivision Regulations should include this requirement as a part of the subdivision platting requirements.

## **ENHANCEMENT PLANS**

### **Historic Downtown Bryan Enhancement Plan**

#### **Overview**

The Historic Downtown Bryan extends approximately from Sims Street between 24<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Street on the west to Texas Avenue and from 28<sup>th</sup> Street on the south to MLK on the north. It includes portions of Main Street, Bryan Street, Tabor Street, the Railroad tracks, William Joel Bryan Drive, the Municipal Building, the Brazos County Court House and the Carnegie Library (Brazos Valley Genealogical Resource Center).

Historic Downtown Bryan is currently considered a potential asset to the community by many of its citizens. Based on discussions with the CPAC, citizens, the Main Street Program and staff, the consensus was that the downtown area should continue to be developed as a mixed-use area. It should combine retail, professional offices, restaurants, and entertainment venues. Residential units could be located on the upper floors of the historically and architecturally interesting buildings. By implementing the following recommended improvements in Historic Downtown Bryan, it should become an economically viable district that will be able to sustain additional commercial growth throughout the community. Historic Downtown Bryan will likely witness in-fill development, which will intensify the use of Historic Downtown Bryan creating a lively, vibrant destination.

Historic Downtown Bryan offers great potential due to the abundance of historic structures with architectural significance and interesting appearances that span a wide range of years from the 1890 through the 1960's. While many the buildings in Historic Downtown Bryan appear to be structurally sound, they are in need of some form of repair. The renovations to the LaSalle Hotel, the reuse of the Palace Theatre site as a focal point and the buildings that have participated in the Paint Program are a good beginning to the turnaround of the downtown area.

Other buildings have desirable architecture and could be an asset to Historic Downtown Bryan if refurbished. They include the Howell Building, Charles Hotel, old Municipal Building, Parker Building to name but a few.

#### **Main Street Program**

A successful beginning to the renewal of the downtown has been achieved by the Main Street Program. Initiated in 1992, it has become the successor to several downtown programs and organizations. The Main Street programs include Business Development Loan Fund, The Building Loan Improvement Program, The Paint Program and the Historic Tax Credit Program. It has assisted a number of businesses and residents to improve their buildings through the offered programs. Identifying important and significant buildings and what their adaptive reuse might be is an on going project of Main Street. It should be noted that the Main Street program is a program, not just a location.

#### **Considerations for Enhancement**

To create this attractive, interesting, family oriented place where citizens and visitors will want to shop and be entertained, there are four issues to be addressed including creating a mixed use environment, accessibility, aesthetics, and pedestrian orientation.

The Main Street Program, Chamber of Commerce, downtown business owners and the City should continue their partnership to conduct active promotional campaigns to attract new businesses to Historic Downtown Bryan.

### **Mixed Use**

In order for Historic Downtown Bryan to play important economic and social roles, a variety of uses need to be present. Missing elements in Historic Downtown Bryan are a destination restaurant, a specialty grocery store, family entertainment spots (ice cream parlor), a bakery, storefront offices, residential units, parking for residents and defined improved open space for parks and recreational activities.

Intensifying entertainment and restaurant uses will substantially enhance Historic Downtown Bryan, as well. These uses can be located anywhere within Historic Downtown Bryan as long as more intensive, continuous uses (cafes and theme restaurants) and other uses (movie theaters) are located on the periphery. As retail and service businesses change over time, retail uses should be directed to those buildings and service business to the perimeter of Historic Downtown Bryan.

Residential use in Historic Downtown Bryan can also help to create an activity center as long as units are located above street level, thereby not detracting from the street level retail environment, apartments and lofts are appropriate residential uses in Historic Downtown Bryan.

Hotels provide destinations for visitors and business travelers to Bryan. When located downtown and in interesting buildings, they provide an alternative to the chain operations on the highways.

Vacant lots offer unique opportunities to develop pocket parks. Landscaping, benches, a gazebo or band stand, and public art within a park would complement the existing uses in Historic Downtown Bryan. The park would help create the sense of Historic Downtown Bryan as a destination. It could also serve as a staging area for annual festivals and activities in Historic Downtown Bryan.

Bryan is fortunate to have several museums in the downtown area the Carnegie Library and the Children's Museum. These facilities should utilize a united permanent promotional campaign that links the facilities to each other and to other area attractions.

### **Access**

It is essential that residents, visitors and particularly potential customers have good access to Historic Downtown Bryan. As such, a top priority should be improvement of street conditions throughout the district. Streets should be in good condition and where curbs and gutters are partial or non-existent, they should be installed to adequately drain the streets and prevent flooding.

Another significant asset to vehicles entering Historic Downtown Bryan is clear and distinct signage. Distinctive street signs which convey the character of the district will assist shoppers to easily find their destination while helping to alleviate confusion for visitors.

### **Aesthetics**

A business district is largely characterized by its physical appearance. Factors influencing the appearance include architecture, facade maintenance, gateways, signage, landscaping, open space, street furniture, and lighting. Additions or improvements to the appearance will encourage residents and visitors to come to Historic Downtown Bryan for single and multi-purpose trips. If an area appears depressed, underutilized or unsafe, people will avoid it. If it is active, attractive, and safe, people will come.

Historic Downtown Bryan is in direct competition with commercial uses in other parts of the city and with those in College Station. Therefore, by enhancing its appeal, Historic Downtown Bryan can become a preferred destination for consumers. Fortunately, many of the buildings in Historic Downtown Bryan have architectural and historic integrity in age from 1890s to the



1930s. Improvements to these buildings require a full range of improvements from cosmetic enhancements to major structural improvements.

Another initiative that would aesthetically enhance Historic Downtown Bryan is the creation of outdoor space. A café next to a right-of-way could utilize the space for outdoor dining. Improvements as simple as tables, chairs and umbrellas with planters and festive lights create a usable pleasant space.

### **Pedestrian Friendliness**

The purpose of a pedestrian friendly Historic Downtown Bryan is to encourage people to get out of their cars and interact with other people. Historic Downtown Bryan must be considered pedestrian friendly when a person desires to visit the district and complete their business on foot. It is important that all sidewalks within Historic Downtown Bryan are in good condition. An interesting and appealing sidewalk design can encourage this activity.

A design theme should be implemented throughout Historic Downtown Bryan to create a unifying identity. Corners can be enhanced for pedestrians to facilitate crossing streets by creating extensions which effectively shorten the distance from one corner to another making it easier and safer to cross the street. Pedestrian refuges can be created at the half point of crossing a street to create a protective zone for pedestrians to wait for passing traffic. This is particularly important for wider arterial streets such as Main and Bryan. Shade is an important factor in creating a pleasant walking environment for pedestrians, which can be accomplished with sidewalk canopies on store fronts and/or planting street trees. Sidewalks should comply with ADA requirements. The relocation of utility meters from the sidewalks to adjacent spaces will improve both safety and appearance. An overall attractive “streetscape” will encourage citizens and visitors to come to the downtown area for shopping and entertainment.

### **Goal, Objectives and Actions for Historic Downtown Bryan**

***Goal: The Historic Downtown Bryan shall be a vibrant mix of places to work, to live and to visit, with shops, restaurants, places of entertainment and a variety of dwelling units.***

The Historic Downtown Bryan should combine a balance of economic and social roles in a unique way to create a destination for residents of and visitors to the Bryan/College Station/Brazos County region. Historic Downtown Bryan should be a major activity center and focal point of the community. It should be the heart within the heart of the community. It is ready to be rediscovered.

Improvements made to the physical appearance and functionality of the district will have a significant impact on the viability of Historic Downtown Bryan. Currently, there may be perceptions of architectural discontinuity, a lack of identity, and aging or deteriorating buildings and infrastructure coupled with a deficit of popular establishments. The following concepts were formulated as a vision of what is needed in the future for Historic Downtown Bryan.

The relocation of inappropriate uses from the downtown area should improve the overall perception of both appearance and safety as well as provide another potential structure for redevelopment.

**Objective 1:** Encourage the renovation, reuse and redevelopment of structures in Historic Downtown Bryan in a manner that is compatible with the area's architectural and historic character and that will bring businesses, visitors and residents to downtown Bryan.

- Action 1: Comprehensive, consistent use and application of the provisions of the *Existing Building Code* shall be applied when reviewing redevelopment and improvements to older structures.
- Action 2: Enhancements of design features for sidewalks, parking, lighting shall be utilized to promote a more attractive appearance.
- Action 3: Incentives shall be available to encourage the redevelopment and adaptive re-usage of historical and architecturally significant buildings and structures.
- Action 4: Appraised values of improved and restored buildings shall remain at a pre-improvement value in order not to discourage the investment in the restored structures.
- Action 5: Encouragement of lease/purchase arrangements of historic properties and downtown buildings.
- Action 6: New in-fill development should be encouraged to be designed to blend with the existing structures.
- Action 7: Promote a safe environment through design and community based law enforcement.

**Objective 2:** Encourage residential dwellings on the upper stories of commercial buildings within Historic Downtown Bryan.

- Action 1: Tax incentives should be available to property owners that use previously unutilized upper floor square footage within their building for residential purposes.
- Action 2: Utilize the flexibility of the *Existing Building Code* to allow renovation and reconstruction with materials and design appropriate to the original style and proposed of the building.

**Objective 3:** Create an aesthetic and physically appealing character in the Historic Downtown Bryan that creates a unique destination for visitors. Utilize urban design guidelines consistent with Historic Downtown Bryan's existing mixture of architectural styles to create a strong and cohesive "sense of place".

- Action 1: Utilize reasonable design guidelines or standards for Historic Downtown Bryan that are used to guide decisions pertaining to new development and redevelopment.
- Action 2: Prepare design guidelines or standards in cooperation with property owners and the Historic Preservation Commission.
- Action 3: Adopt and implement the design guidelines or standards.
- Action 4: Incorporate distinctive improvements such as street and sidewalk paving patterns into Historic Downtown Bryan.
- Action 5: Repair and maintenance of sidewalks as infrastructure by the City.
- Action 6: Construct entrance markers as "mini-gateways" to the downtown with identification signs and landscaping.

**Objective 4:** Attract more entertainment and dining establishments and uses to Historic Downtown Bryan including movie theaters, restaurants and sidewalk cafes.

Action 1: The City in partnership, or at least in cooperation with, the Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Association should establish an aggressive commercial and retail development program to attract and retain entertainment and restaurant uses within Historic Downtown Bryan.

Action 2: Offer incentives to property owners who lease or develop their buildings with entertainment or restaurant uses.

Action 3: Offer a clear and expedited permit processing for residential, entertainment, restaurant and other desirable uses.

Action 4: Encourage the location of museums and art and artisan galleries.

**Objective 5:** Provide direct and adequate access to the Historic Downtown Bryan thereby encouraging shopping and entertainment trips by local residents and tourist.

Action 1: Designate and label routes to Historic Downtown Bryan so that it is easier to find from Texas Avenue, William Joel Bryan, Briarcrest Drive, Villa Maria, the SH6 Bypass and College Station.

Action 2: Consider the development of a trolley system that would link areas of the City to each other and other destinations such as the Bush Library.

**Objective 6:** Explore the feasibility of plazas, pocket parks or improved open space in Historic Downtown Bryan with historic markers and interesting placards and amenities such as native Texas

Action 1: Promote/encourage the use of plazas, pocket park or improved open space in Historic Downtown Bryan for pedestrian congregation and activity areas.

Action 2: Contact property owners of vacant parcels within Historic Downtown Bryan to determine the feasibility of acquisition or likelihood of dedication or use as a park or public space.

Action 3: Identify specific parcels and create plans for the pocket parks or improved open space. Request design assistance from departments and students at Blinn College and Texas A&M that study parks, landscape architecture, planning, graphic design and similar fields.

**Objective 7:** Expand the business development incentives programs that offer financial assistance and technical expertise to commercial property owners within the entire Historic Downtown Bryan for upgrading

Action 1: Support the Business Development Loan Fund, The Building Loan Improvement Program, the Paint Program and the Historic Tax Credit Program to assist property owners with the improvement of properties, facades and other physical enhancements in Historic Downtown Bryan.

Action 2: Consider the creation of a municipal improvement district within Historic Downtown Bryan that has the authority to levy an assessment apportioned for the improvements.

Action 3: Solicit funds from private businesses to supplement a program grant fund.

- Action 4: Solicit the involvement of local financial institutions to establish a low interest loan program for property and facade improvements.

**Objective 8:** Enhance the appearance of off-street parking areas.

- Action 1: Develop parking facilities that are compatible with the overall desired appearance of Historic Downtown Bryan. Consider the construction of a parking garage for hotel guests and residents. The street level of such a structure
- Action 2: Encourage “car parks” with trees, art works, water fountains and benches in addition to the parking spaces.
- Action 3: Include requirements in the landscape ordinance and parking requirements to assure requirements for perimeter screening and interior landscaping of off-street parking areas.
- Action 4: Create a partnership with private parking lot owners. Provide property tax credit or rebate on materials and equipment incentives to comply with landscaping requirements within a specified time period.
- Action 5: Provide bus shelters for public transportation. Design them to be compatible with the over all appearance of Historic Downtown Bryan.

**Objective 9:** Develop a comprehensive street lighting program throughout Historic Downtown Bryan.

- Action 1: Initiate a street lamp replacement program throughout Historic Downtown Bryan and the historical district that replaces existing cobra style lights with attractive antique theme light poles.
- Action 2: Develop a street lamp replacement program with a phased implementation schedule.
- Action 3: Install a specific style of lampposts throughout Historic Downtown Bryan to assist in creating an identifiable business district.
- Action 4: Incorporate replacement costs into the Capital Improvement Plan and Annual Budget.

**Objective 10:** Improve the appearance of railroad right-of-way. Utilize it for a linkage and outdoor activities, particularly when the façades of the adjacent buildings are, or can be made, an interesting feature that will attract users.

- Action 1: The City should facilitate the improvements that utilize the railroad area while protecting people from the train traffic.
- Action 2: Improve areas such as Tabor and the railroad tracks within Historic Downtown Bryan and determine the best method for enhancing their appearance.
- Action 3: If proposed relocation of mainline freight train traffic to a new rail alignment outside the core urban area is feasible, consider use of the existing rail corridor for future light rail transit and rails-to-trails.

**Objective 11:** Historic Downtown Bryan should have good pedestrian circulation.

- Action 1: Improve the pedestrian environment in Historic Downtown Bryan by creating an organized and efficient network of sidewalks throughout Historic Downtown Bryan.
- Action 2: Draft specifications for improving the sidewalks such as use of pavers and other decorative features on internal and perimeter sidewalks. Include corner extensions and pedestrian refuges to facilitate safe street crossing.

**Objective 12:** Promote the use of sidewalk canopies on storefronts to create a comfortable and attractive pedestrian environment.

- Action 1: Provide incentives to encourage property and business owners to install canopies to provide shade and shelter as well as an attractive cohesive appearance in Historic Downtown Bryan.
- Action 2: Amend the building code to allow support poles for the canopies in the right-of-way.
- Action 3: Prepare a phased implementation with property owner input.
- Action 4: Offer a rebate for canopy installation/replacement through the Main Street Program to property and business owners of targeted properties.

**Objective 13:** Capitalize on the Carnegie Library (Brazos Valley Center) and historic buildings of Historic Downtown Bryan by creating a walking tour.

- Action 1: The City should highlight its historic resources and encourage citizens and visitors to learn more about them.
- Action 2: The Historic Preservation Commission familiar with the historically significant properties within Historic Downtown Bryan could assist in developing a walking tour with descriptive placards and informational kiosks. A walking tour informational guide and promotional materials to market the historic walking tour should be prepared.
- Action 3: Incorporate marketing and placard acquisition and installation expense into the Annual Budget.

**Objective 14:** Continue festival and other community activities to focus attention on Historic Downtown Bryan.

- Action 1: Publicize and encourage participation in the Christmas Festival, Mardi Gras Celebration, Noon Tunes concerts and other community activities.
- Action 2: Encourage cooperative sponsorship of downtown festivals and activities by both public and private organizations.
- Action 3: Support festival permits in terms of cost reduction.
- Action 4: Work with merchants and civic groups to encourage post festival clean up campaigns in cooperation with the city.
- Action 5: Consider the renewal of the "Festifall" as a regional type festival that showcases the downtown and its history.

- Action 6: Create positive partnerships with businesses and property owners and city departments to sponsor festivals and community activities in Historic Downtown Bryan.
- Action 7: Encourage the Downtown property owners and tenants to explore opportunities for festivals and other community activities.
- Action 8: Provide visible patrol presence in downtown on foot or bicycle particularly on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings.

### **Central Business Corridor Enhancement Plan**

The Central Business Corridor (CBC) is recognized as the major commercial center of the City. It extends east to west generally along Briarcrest and Villa Maria. It is the location of a wide variety of stores and offices, both local and national. It merits attention as there is great interest in promoting and preserving existing commercial activities. Like Historic Downtown Bryan, the area would benefit from improvements to its appearance. Active partners with the City in these endeavors would be the Bryan Business Council, the Chamber of Commerce and the property and business owners. To encourage the continued vitality of the area the following goal, objectives and actions should be considered.

#### **Goal, Objectives and Actions the Central Business Corridor (CBC)**

**Goal:** *The Central Business Corridor (CBC) shall have attractive landscaping and area signage that identifies it as a major commercial area of the City.*

**Objective 1:** Create an aesthetic and physically appealing character in CBC that identifies it as a major commercial area. Utilize urban design guidelines to create a more attractive appearance.

- Action 1: Define the boundaries of the Central Business Corridor in cooperation with the business and property owners.
- Action 2: Conduct a corridor enhancement study and develop an implementation plan.
- Action 3: Utilize reasonable design guidelines or standards for the CBC to guide decisions pertaining to new development and redevelopment.
- Action 4: Prepare design guidelines or standards in cooperation with property owners and the property owners association.
- Action 5: Adopt and implement the design guidelines or standards in an overlay district.
- Action 6: Incorporate distinctive design features and improvements such as area signage, parking, lighting and street and sidewalk paving patterns into the CBC.
- Action 7: Construct entrance makers as “mini-gateways” to the CBC with identification signs and landscaping.

**Objective 2:** Encourage the adaptive re-use of older buildings for new commercial ventures.

- Action 1: Investigate tax incentives for the redevelopment of existing structures for new uses.
- Action 2: Form public/private partnerships to redevelop existing structures.

Action 3: Incentives shall be available to encourage the redevelopment and adaptive re-usage of historical and architecturally significant buildings and structures.

Action 4: Appraised values of improved buildings shall remain at a pre-improvement value for a specified number of years in order not to discourage the investment in the redeveloped structures.

Action 5: Identify programs and financing tools to encourage the redevelopment of existing properties and the development of vacant land.

Action 6: Identify the barriers or “blockers” to redevelopment. Investigate potential tax incentives that eliminate or reduce “blockers”

**Objective 3:** Encourage accessibility and traffic safety to preserve mobility and transportation capacity.

Action 1: Provide traffic access management to and from adjacent residential and commercial areas.

Action 2: Discourage direct access to arterials from adjacent residential development.

Action 3: Limit or prohibit on-street parking to maintain mobility.

Action 4: Encourage shared driveway access to promote mobility.

**Objective 4:** Enhance the appearance of off-street parking areas.

Action 1: Develop parking facilities that are compatible with the overall desired appearance of the CBC.

Action 2: Encourage “car parks” with trees, art works, water fountains and benches in addition to the parking spaces.

Action 3: Include requirements in the landscape ordinance and parking requirements to assure requirements for perimeter screening and interior landscaping of off-street parking areas.

Action 4: Create a partnership with private parking lot owners. Provide property tax credit or rebate incentives on materials and equipment to comply with landscaping requirements in a specified time period.

**Objective 5:** Encourage pedestrian accesses to the businesses in the CBC.

Action 1: Provide continuous sidewalks along both sides of arterial streets.

**Objective 6:** Develop multi-modal transportation accessibility to the CBC.

Action 1: Construct bus turn out lanes to promote safety and traffic flow.

Action 2: Provide bus shelters and information kiosks for public transportation. Encourage appropriate design that are compatible with the over all appearance of the CBC.

Action 3: Consider bicycle lanes on appropriate streets.

Action 4: Install parking facilities for bicycles.

Action 5: Set aside an area for a “park and ride” facility for commuters and carpools.

Action 6: Discourage direct access to arterials from adjacent residential development.

It should be noted here that the guidelines for the CBC are applicable to other commercial areas of the City that would benefit from improved appearances and accessibility.

## **Implementation**

Successful implementation of all the Enhancement Plans will rely on four critical factors:

- Public/private cooperation;
- Regulatory consistency;
- Marketing of opportunities; and,
- Financial resources.

The business development climate in Historic Downtown Bryan, the Central Business Corridor and other commercial areas must continue to be strengthened through a joint public-private initiative to promote establishment and growth of desirable retail, service, restaurant, and entertainment businesses. A strong spirit of cooperation between business owners in Historic Downtown Bryan, the CBC and other areas and the City of Bryan should be fostered in the adoption and implementation of new and improved regulations for landscaping, signage, and property maintenance. These will provide the mechanisms to improve the appearance in the City as a whole. The City will provide the organizational capacity and resources needed to implement the Plan.

Any enhancement plan must be considered an economic development plan as well as building renovation and appearance plan. Economic Development is the cooperative action between the public and private sectors, which results in widespread and sustained private investment. Some key concepts include cooperative action, partnering, and sustained private investment via the marketplace. The community's economic development program relates to community actions designed to attract and encourage business growth and promote job creation.

There are a variety of potential funding sources that include the following:

- ◆ Creation of a self-assessment benefit district which levies a special assessment tax on businesses and property owners in the district for the purpose of carrying out specific public physical improvements.
- ◆ Creation of a special service area in which property owners are taxed with a mill levy or a special assessment and the funds generated are used for infrastructure improvements, maintenance programs, public parking, etc.
- ◆ Sales tax funds dedicated for revitalization and redevelopment of commercial areas. The City may utilize non-profit development corporations to promote the creation of new and expanded industry and manufacturing activity within the city and surrounding vicinity. A Section 4A-development corporation is funded by the imposition of a local sales and use tax dedicated to economic development. The Section 4B one-half cent sales tax can be used to promote a wide range of civic and commercial projects. These are possible if the city has room in the local sales tax structure.
- ◆ Work to obtain State approval of Transportation Enhancement funds for improving sidewalks and streetscapes within Historic Downtown Bryan.
- ◆ Utilize Community Development Block (CDBG) Grant funds for public infrastructure and community services programs.
- ◆ City of Bryan Capital Improvement Program and Annual Budget.
- ◆ Transportation Equity Act of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21) and State Highway Funds can be used for a variety of transportation enhancements and improvements. For example,



the Surface Transportation Program may be used for improvements on roads that are not functionally classified as local or rural minor collectors.

- ◆ Texas Recreation and Parks Account Program (TRPA) of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department allows local units of government to apply for park grant funds for outdoor recreation from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. This program provides 50 percent matching grant assistance to eligible local governments for the acquisition and development of public recreation areas and facilities.
- ◆ Venue taxes—Cities may adopt a venue project tax whereby they can collect taxes to fund a specific voter-approved economic development project. Projects may include sports stadiums, convention centers and related improvements, or tourist development along an inland waterway. Venues that may be taxed include admissions, motor vehicle rental, event parking, hotel occupancy, and facility uses.
- ◆ Local Property Tax Incentives that may be utilized by cities to attract commercial enterprise are:
  - ◆ Property Tax Abatement in which a city may enter into an agreement to abate (waive and/or postpone) property taxes in a "reinvestment zone"
  - ◆ Tax Increment Financing is a tool to publicly finance needed structural improvements and enhanced infrastructure within a defined area. The costs of the improvements are repaid by the contribution of all of a portion of future tax revenues that are attributed to the increase in the property values due to the improvements in the reinvestment zone.
- ◆ Economic Development through Tourism - A city may adopt the following programs to augment tourism programs that bring visitors to the area.
  - ◆ Local Hotel occupancy tax provides an important source of funding for maintenance of a city's tourism program.
  - ◆ Designation under the Texas Program for Historic Landmarks with the owners' approval provides eligibility for ad valorem tax exemptions and state grant preservation funds, technical preservation assistance and inclusion in travel guides.
  - ◆ Designation under the National Register for Historic Places makes certain tax credits available for certified rehabilitation of income producing buildings and allows for federal historic preservation grants-in-aid.
- ◆ Grants and Loans for Economic Development - A city may provide a grant or loan of city funds or services to promote economic development, but must insure that the public purpose of economic development will be pursued by the business through the creation of jobs or expansion of the tax base by construction of or enhancement of physical facilities. Safeguards and demonstrable benefits should be stipulated in a contract in which there are tangible means for measuring the business' meeting of its obligations.

A city may provide land to promote economic development by obtaining and even partially developing a site to show to businesses that may relocate to the area. Examples may include the purchase of land for municipal facilities including water and sewer treatment plants, industrial parks, municipal airports, and city streets.
- ◆ Issuing Debt for Finance Economic Development - If permitted by the city charter, a city may issue bonds to finance infrastructure improvements and certain manufacturing and commercial facilities. These bonds may be issued through the development corporation, a tax increment financing district or other appropriate entity. Commercial buildings must be subsequently leased to a private entity. Bonds may also be issued by

an industrial development corporation and are payable solely from the sales tax proceeds.

- ◆ Economic Development through Infrastructure Improvements - Public Improvement Districts (PIDs) are a means for undertaking public improvements by allowing a city to levy and collect special assessments for property with the city or its ETJ. Improvements include water, wastewater, sewer drainage, sidewalks, street, mass transit, parking, library, park and recreation, landscaping, art installation, pedestrian malls and other similar projects. Also included are safety services and business-related services such as advertising, recruitment and development. The city or affected property owners must petition for the creation of a PID. The revenue from the special assessment must be used for the specified improvements or developments in the PID.
- ◆ Municipal management (downtown) districts are a relatively new way that commercial property owners may enhance a defined business area to finance facilities and improvements above and beyond what is already provided by the city or property owners. The improvements may be paid for by a combination of self-imposed property taxes, special assessments impact fees and other charges against the property owner. Such a district is meant to enhance, not replace city services in the area.

## **Conclusion**

Improvements that will make the City attractive, the CBC prosperous and Historic Downtown Bryan viable again will take time and require community-based support. They cannot be accomplished by the City alone, or a few individuals. Partnerships, both public and private, for improvements and adoption of areas for maintenance will reduce the financial burdens. The citizens must also support the establishments that locate in Historic Downtown Bryan, the CBC and other commercial areas. They should consider these areas as a possible location for their office or business, support the financing of the civic improvements and promote its activities with pride.

For Further Information

***Contact the City of Bryan Planning Department.***

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